

" L A U R A N I A "

"Our morals will be gone, but our Maxims will remain."

Laurania #1

Letter Issue.

15 May 1969

Laurania is an occasional journal of postal Diplomacy, edited and published by John McCallum, Balston, Alberta, Canada. Single copies sell for ten cents, twenty cents for issues of more than 10 pages; extended subscriptions are at the rate of 100 pages for a dollar. Diplomacy is a game manufactured and sold by Games Research, Inc., 48 Wareham St., Boston, Mass., 02118.

Laurania.

Some months ago Larry Peery approached me to see if I could look after his Xenogogic games temporarily during a period when he expects to be heavily involved with other activities. I agreed, but he later decided that it would be better to suspend his games for a few months. Nonetheless, I have decided to go ahead with Laurania, the journal which was to have carried his games; there is probably a niche in Dippydom for a paper of general comment. Though sudden changes in plans seem to be endemic to Laurania. After learning that it would not carry the Xenogogic games my next idea for the initial issue was a bibliographic article, listing all Diplomacy zines ever published so far as I know them. That decision was no sooner arrived at than a letter came from Rod Walker - he plans precisely the same thing for the mid-May issue of Erehwon. Oh, well, we can always discuss the rating lists.

This issue of Laurania will go to all Diplomacy editors known to me. I would like to trade all-for-all with all of them. In the cases of those with whom I previously traded for Aceldama or, earlier, Broddingnag, I will assume that a trade agreement is in force unless I hear to the contrary. In the case of newer editors I would appreciate a note saying whether a trade is in effect or not.

Subscription copies, and trade copies, will often be sent several issues at a time in order to save postage. This policy also applies to Vimy Victors, the zine which carries the moves of game 1967AJ, a game whose management I am taking over from Jutland Jollies. Players' copies of JJ, and of Laurania, too, if it ever has any games, will be by the fastest possible method. For most players this will normally mean Air Mail. However, at present there is an air mechanics strike on in Canada, so that just now Air Mail travels no faster than surface mail. Subscriptions to either or both magazines are at the rate indicated at the top of the page.

Crypto-Diplomacy

Aceldama #10 carried a letter from Allen Calhamer on a Secret Service version of Diplomacy, or Crypto-Diplomacy. There was surprisingly little comment on the issue. Letters were received from Dick Schultz (19159 Helen, Detroit, Mich., 48234), and from John Mansfield, CFB Gagetown, Oromocto, New Brunswick). However, they were not so much comments on the material in Aceldama as replies to letters of my own which had referred to that material. The only other response was from Allen Calhamer himself, with additional thoughts on the subject. As anything from the inventor of our game is of interest it appeared that these letters of his might make a good opening feature for this magazine.

Before giving his letters it may be well to review briefly what appeared earlier. Essentially two different types of code Diplomacy games were suggested. The first was contained in a letter of my own to Dr. Calhamer. In it each player was to have a code which he would agree on with the gamesmaster before play began. All his orders to his forces would be published in this code, and, similarly, so would the gamesmaster's instructions to him. Other players would know his moves to the extent that they could break his code, aided by what they could deduce from the allowed and disallowed moves of their own forces. Calhamer's counter proposal was for a game of anonymity where the players would negotiate with one another only through the gamesmaster and again would set up code systems for correspondence. A further letter of his on the subject follows below; it was written before Aceldama #10 appeared.

Regarding crypto-diplomacy, I think that if the players used 1) ciphers or 2) word-for-word substitution codes that were not time-dependent, the game would come out about as you envision it. But if the players take a list of provinces, commands, etc., and assign a simple formula to change the numbers each round (just add 6 to each one, each move, for example), and possibly end by converting the numbers to arbitrary symbols (e.g., by looking in a numbered list of words commonly misspelled; probably available for a quarter; you keep one and send an identical copy to the GM - thus the outsider does not even see the numbers, in order to guess the "add six" rule) the code is very likely to be unbreakable.

It is true that a player who cannot crack any code still has all the resources available to him of a Kriegspiel-like variant.

However, knowing human beings as I do, I would predict that, in the first couple of games at least, field codes and such like would be used, and the game would come out much as you envision it. But I think eventually the codes would become totally impossible to break. Then, whatever resources such as reconnaissance moves and straight exchange of information the

players had would simply be the resources of the Kriegspiel-like variant.

Of course, if the code did not change each season matters would be a little different - You discover that "rarefy" means Sevastopol; an ally tells you that the same opponent uses "sacrilegious" for Warsaw; and so on. But it is easy to have rarefy mean something different each season. The code is Warsaw # 38 + dn, where n is the number of the season; then Warsaw equals first the 38th word on the list, then the 44th, then the 50th, etc. The opponent doesn't even have the list, or know about the numbers - all he gets is "rarefy" or "sacrilegious". And it will never mean the same thing twice.

Incidentally, even a cipher can be pretty rough, if a Vignere is used with a very long key. A "field code" usually has a five or six letter key. But the player and GM are not in the trenches; their positions are more like those of naval commanders (or, hell, diplomats - at the home office). They can file a 50-letter key - or even hang it on the wall!

Our founder wrote his next letter on the subject after seeing the issue of Icelandia, #10, which carried the previous correspondence. Here it is.

In Icelandia #10, page 8, where you state that my suggestion concerning crypto-Diplomacy is "unplayable", you misunderstand the mechanics. In that variant Russia, say, makes up six codes, using one to write to each country. Since he does not know the identities of the players, he sends the six keys, labelled by country, to the GM, who sends each key to the appropriate country. This Austria, for instance, receives six keys, one from each country, in a single packet from the GM. Thus Austria can read anything encrypted in "Russia-to-Austria", "Turkey-to-Austria", etc. He only has to crack codes when he wants to read stuff written in "Russia-to-Turkey", "Turkey-to-France", etc.

The rationale for permitting all the encrypted messages is that the magazine represents a potpourri of stuff intercepted in various ways and passed around the diplomatic billiard tables, including stuff taken off the air. Presumably there is a high volume of other stuff, not intercepted (not represented in the game) but at least one message of each type is picked up and passed around. Since in the game the volume of traffic is very low, we use it all to represent the minority of intercepted messages.

It is, of course, true that I misunderstood Calhauer's proposed game, as he points out in the second letter. "Unplayable" has to be withdrawn. The game would, I think, be playable. And, of course, I think that my version would also be playable. As to the automatic change of code every move, I specifically stated, in the earlier

Acaldama discussion that every change of code would necessitate duplicate sets of orders, one in the old and one in the new codes. To change every season on an automatic basis would merely mean that the player would have to provide two sets of orders every time. If he didn't, the gamesmaster would do it for him with far more chance of breaking as the gamesmaster can hardly be expected to waste much time on such niceties as giving the same orders in different words, and so on, which the player could do for himself. Note also that by the terms laid down, any published source used, such as a list of commonly misspelled words, must appear in the clear somewhere in the player's propaganda releases.

What Calhamer states about our position being much more like an Embassy, or a fleet at sea, where an elaborate and time-consuming code can be used, than it is like conditions of a company or battery under fire, is quite correct. This is but one more instance of the well known fact that our game is more a strategic than a tactical game. However, I am not sure that this would necessarily make for the use of extravagantly long keys. Note that by the terms laid down every Key word used must appear in the clear somewhere in the player's propaganda releases. "Fink", "swine", or even "oranges" might well appear innocently buried in the text of a typical press release without exciting any comment, and the gamesmaster could affirm that the rules laid down had been adhered to. But "Bubbles Honey-Keeps your strength up" would certainly excite comment, even in the middle of a typical Larry Poery release. So that the rules as formerly given do, I think, provide some protection against completely unbreakable codes.

Names of Dippy Zines

As we all know the first magazine to be devoted to the postal play of Diplomacy was John Beardman's Graustark whose first issue appeared just six years ago in May 1963. It took its name from the novel, Graustark, by George Barr McCutcheon, the novel, in turn being named for the principality in which the action supposedly takes place. The next Dippy zine, Ruritanic, likewise took its name from a fictional country, in this case the scene of "The Prisoner of Zenda" and its sequel, "Rupert of Hentzau" both by Anthony Hope (Hawkins).

A tradition thus seeming well on its way to being established, that Diplomacy journals . . . should be named for fictional countries, of the approximate time and place of our game, the question arose as to how many such names could be found. In an early Ruritanic its editor, Dave McDaniel prepared a list of such, being assisted by a number of his players and readers. The original list contained ten names and two or three others were suggested in the ensuing correspondence.

(It should perhaps be pointed out that the expression, "place and time of our game" is not too well defined. For place, it has usually been considered to mean somewhere in Europe or,

perhaps, Europe with the additional peripheral bits of Africa and Asia Minor shown on our map. Both the original "Ruritania" and the original "Graustark" appear to be somewhere not too far from the Danube, although the authors are, understandably, not over precise. Time of our game is less definite. "The Prisoner of Zenda" was first published in 1893 or 1894, and its sequel and its best known imitator, "Graustark", appeared a year or so later. So "the time of our game" seems to go back at least a half decade before it ostensibly starts in 1900. One of the names suggested in the list mentioned above, "Fredonia" comes from a Marx Brothers film, "Duck Soup" which was produced in the thirties, and in which the characters wear contemporary dress. Of the nearly seventy postal games completed not one has so far progressed into the thirties, and only one lasted into the twenties. So, seemingly, the time restriction is interpreted with considerable latitude on both sides.)

Of the dozen additional titles suggested in the Ruritania article, and following discussion, only two have been used, namely, "Fredonia" and "Marsovia". This ignoring of the suggested names did not indicate that the tradition which was beginning was being dropped but that it was being given a wider interpretation. Fredonia was the next major publication to appear after the list appeared in Ruritania; its editor, John Boardman, had presumably suggested the inclusion of the name in the first place. The next two zines to appear showed the change of emphasis. They were Brobdingnag which took its name from a fictional country appearing in a classic of English literature, and a name which took us back a century and a half before the time of our game, and to the other side of the world somewhere in the Pacific. And Trantor, from a science fiction story which took us to another world. In this wider sense of naming Diplomacy magazines after fictional places, anywhere and anywhere, the idea has been very considerably adhered to. As there are many science fiction and fantasy fans among Diplomacy players many zines have followed Trantor and taken their names from stories of space travel and the like. And a good sprinkling have taken their names from imaginary places in fiction written with serious intent, as Brobdingnag did.

It is true, of course, that naming zines after fictional places is not as prevalent now as it once was. But IHostigos, Ragnarok, and Nemedian Chronicles, all begun within the last year or so, show that the idea is not dead yet. I am anxious to see the list of zines published which Ned Walker will be publishing shortly in Erehwon; I would be prepared to bet that at least 25% or so of the zines on it will be found to have followed the idea in one form or another.

Strangely, that list in Ruritania did not include "Laurania". It would qualify under the strictest definition of "fictional country of the time and place of our game."

Despatch Box

Rod Walker, 1575-A White Drive, Rantoul, Illinois, 61866:

I suspect that the next Brekwon will be out before ((Iourania)), so you will have a chance to incorporate my bibliographic material in your list (and vice-versa, when I print corrections). I think my list will include some items you have not seen. Particularly the rash of propaganda zines by von Metzke, Birsan, and Lindblad which say, and are seeing, limited distribution to people playing in The Voice, but with distribution entirely separate from the main 'zine, I might add: The Bugler, The Voice from Reason, The Curmudgeon, The Inner Circle, and Vienna something-or-other. Also two propaganda zines originating from a game in Lomokome, The Görlitz Pentacle and Golos Riot!, and Bob Foster's propagandazine for #1968ND, the new York telephone game, in which he did not play, The Confederate Observer.

The frightening thing of all this is that there might be an entirely independent system of postal Dippy we know nothing about, and that we will discover it and that, therefore, we have at least as much stuff to collect as already exists. Horrors!

((+(The world is so full of a number of things, I am sure we should be as happy as kings, nichtwahr? Think of the chase to find the stuff.

I have only seen one copy of one of the propagandazines you mention although I have heard of several of them. There is no question that your collection is much more complete than mine in such current peripheral material. On the other hand I would not be surprised if I am able to find omissions in your listing of material produced in the early years. In any event expect a long nit-picking letter after your next issue. As you can see I decided not to go ahead with publishing my own planned listing; there will be players who will think that your list is more than enough, without getting a similar list from me.

By the way, what is your estimate of the percentage of postal Diplomacy players who actually collect zines? Pretty small in my opinion. There are some, of course. Far more will just throw all their zines in a corner of the closet, they accumulate rather than collect. And very many, of course, just throw the damned things away after they have submitted their moves or after they receive the next issue. It might be a useful job for the Diplomacy section of the Games Bureau to poll all active players and make some sort of census of the material on hand. -jamcc+))

Rod Walker (address above):

I am adopting the following rule: "If a player neglects to order certain units on the board, they will stand and, if dislodged, be annihilated in accordance with rule 9. However, if he simultaneously gives orders to certain nonexistent units, the Games-

master will assume he has confused the location of his real units and make the following adjustments. If the number of nonexistent units equals the number of unordered units, the orders will be transferred to the units in such a way that the largest number of legal and unequivocal orders is produced. This will be an entirely mechanical process, and no consideration will be given to the possible intent of the player. If the number of unordered and nonexistent units is not equal, the Gamesmaster will transfer only such orders as may be legally followed by one, and only one, of the unordered units (i.e., if nonexistent unit F Mid is ordered to Spain (s.c.), and there are unordered Is Mar and Por, the Gamesmaster will take no action -- however, if F Mar were A Mar, then, as the order is obviously meant for a F, the P Por will be ordered to Spain)." Commentez, s'il vous plait.

((+Well, all of this is very far from my idea of a gamesmaster's duty. In my opinion the more clear cut and sharp the distinction between the player's task and the gamesmaster's task, the better. In games that I run if a player orders a nonexistent force he has dirtied some paper but done nothing else whatever. If he doesn't order one of his forces, that force has an implied stand order and it stands, if it can. And that is all. In other words, when receiving orders from a certain player I regard myself as being, for the time being, the troops of that player: I will obey his orders if exterior circumstance allows me to do so. But I am his troops, I am not his staff officer. I obey his orders, I do not polish, interpret, or enlarge upon them. This saves the gamesmaster an awful lot of headaches. And players who have played all their games in zines so run don't make many silly mistakes, and are willing to accept the consequences of the own mistake when they do make one. As for players not so willing, the sooner they go away and bother us no more, the better for postal Diplomacy. -jamcc)+))

John Mansfield, CWS Sackville, Cromocto, New Brunswick, Canada, has written me a number of letters asking for a series of articles on Diplomacy for his general wargaming magazine, The Canadian War Game. I keep telling him that I haven't the time to do this but, seemingly, he won't take no for an answer. I will likely manage one very short article for him but that is all. If anyone out there, especially any Canadian out there, would like to write a regular Diplomacy column here is your chance to appear in a well produced magazine with quite a wide distribution. Of course, most of its readers are not now Diplomacy players, but they do play Avalon-Hill and similar type games; they are probably just waiting for the word to become Colbomerites like the rest of us.

Charles H. Reinsel, 120 8th Ave., Clarion, Pennsylvania, 16214:

No, I did not know that ((mine's name deleted)) was finished and this is the point I've always tried to make; why aren't the players informed when a magazine is going to be late or it is going to fold. To me this is an obligation of the utmost

importance, an obligation by the gamesmaster to the players who have trusted him and paid him a fee to play.

((+(Well, we are all amateurs, where are bound to be a few occasions when an editor is unable to get out his magazine on the expected date. Provided those occasions are not too frequent, nor too prolonged, I think we can put up with them. On the other hand I certainly agree that prolonged delays, without explanation to the players is very bad and is responsible for a good deal of the decreasing interest so noticeable in many quarters. I wish there were some very dependable zine, appearing fortnightly or oftener, which everyone received. Then an editor caught out by business pressures, or what not, could send OME card to that zine, saying Drippy Dip will be delayed for three weeks, and know that all his players would get the word. Such a facility not being available he may be in the unfortunate position of not being able to publish, and not be able to write his players either. -jamcc) +))

New Blood.

The following have expressed an interest in postal Diplomacy:

Glen Hertz, 2127 Comm Squadron, Box 1735, APO, San Francisco, 96528.

Erik Kane, 2435 Shoreline Drive, Apt. 312, Alameda, California, 94501.

Paul Ingildsen, 825 186 Ave., N.E., Bellevue, Washington, 98004.

Edward Lenski, P.O.Box 178, Oakdale, N.Y., 11739

To return to Charles Reinsel's letter for a minute. About three years ago Earl Thompson proposed to publish a Diplomacy magazine to be called Vandy II. He had a real system for preventing delays in publishing, etc. The game fees went not to him but to a neutral bystander. For every delayed issue so much was to be deducted from the fee deposit and sent back to the players. So Earl could only get his fee by publishing regularly and on time. Unfortunately he found himself with too many other calls on his time and he folded his zine and sent their money back to those planning to enter his game after the third issue. Some such system on a routine basis may be the answer. But, in a Diplomacy crowd, whom could we trust to hold the cash?